

Reaching Out

PAGE 142

Incomparable Love and
Incomparable Death

PAGE 145

The Scandal of the
Semi-Churched

PAGE 146

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 63, No. 6 • March 28, 2014



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?



James Visscher
Minister emeritus of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Langley, British Columbia
jvisscher@telus.net

Reaching Out (2)

The church is the living proof of his grace

Last time (Vol 63, No 1), we dealt with “Reaching Out” from a personal perspective. This time we will look at “Reaching Out” from a congregational perspective. Only before we delve into the more practical aspects related to that, we need to take a broader look. At what? At our local congregational culture.

Indeed, how would you describe your congregation or church when it comes to reaching out or evangelism? Is it interested, disinterested, or somewhat interested? Is it struggling? Is it active and committed?

A cursory look at the *Yearbook 2013* of the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches reveals that most of our churches have mission (home) or evangelism committees. From this one might jump to the conclusion that our churches can safely be placed in the “active and committed” category.

Looking deeper

A deeper look, however, at times reveals something else. A number of these committees are struggling. They struggle to get proper guidance from their local church council. They struggle to recruit church members for their committee. They struggle as to what approach to take and what programs to promote. They struggle to ignite a fire in the hearts of the members of the congregation.

Of course, there are exceptions, but the fact of the matter is that in too many of our churches the work of evangelism has been relegated to a committee. They are to take care of it. It is their specialty, their burden, their task. It is the hobby of a few.

When visitors ask what is being done about outreach, the members at large are often quick to point to the existence of a committee. It is the proof of our evangelistic spirit.

Really? What is this, but tokenism? It comes under the heading of “let’s appoint a committee, and thus soothe our consciences.” It is an indication that while evangelism may receive lip service among us, it does not necessarily translate into real heart service or serious support.

Is that alright? Will that do? In many respects it depends on how you see the church.

What is the church?

Of course there are many ways to define or describe the church of our Lord. Words like “assembly,” “congregation,” “gathering,” or “community” come to mind. Both the OT and NT root words point in this direction. In addition, there are all sorts of confessional and theological definitions. The Belgic Confession speaks of the church as “a holy congregation and assembly” (Art 27). The Heidelberg Catechism sees it as an assembly that is the fruit of the Son of God who “gathers, defends and preserves” (LD 21). Calvin called it “the community of the faithful which God has ordained and elected to eternal life” (Catechism 1545).

Underlying all of these definitions is the idea that the church is the work of God. He is the One who, through his Son, gathers a people together. We do not find him. He finds us. Added to that is the fact that in and of ourselves we would never have found him because we were too busy living in darkness, superstition, and death. The Apostle Paul says about us, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:1, 2). Dead and dominated is what we were.

But then God made us alive. He rescued and saved us. Paul says that he even “raised us up” and “seated” us with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). From the depths we went to the heights. What a promotion! What a most stunning elevation!

It naturally raises questions like, “Why? Why did God decide to do this? What motivated him?” The answer is found in verse 4 – “But because of his great love for us” (Eph 2:4). Only his love explains our exaltation. It is this wide, deep, and high love, this wonderful love, this love that comes from our God who is “rich in mercy,” that gives us the reason.

The purpose of the church

Only that still leaves some questions about the purpose. What is the reason that he has done and is doing all of this? Why bother

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This issue brings our readers an editorial from Dr. James Visscher that continues his look into “Reaching Out.” This time, reaching out from a congregational perspective. When we take a deeper look, how exactly is a congregation to reach out, to share the good news, and to show God’s grace to the world around us?

We are also able to bring to our readers an article by Kevin DeYounge, reprinted from www.thegospelcoalition.org, called “The Scandal of Semi-Churched.” It addresses irregular church attendance.

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer writes his second article in a series on CanRC involvement in NAPARC. We also have our first “You Asked” question, answered by Rev. William den Hollander. In this column he answers a question about involvement of our churches with such organizations. Keep the questions coming!

Issue 6 includes news of both an ordination (Rev. Wierenga) and retirement (Dr. Nederveen). There is also a Treasures New and Old meditation, an article from the Women’s Savings Action, a press release, and Mission News.

Laura Veenendaal

- 142 EDITORIAL**
Reaching Out (2)
- 145 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Incomparable Love and Incomparable Death
- 146 The Scandal of the Semi-Churches**
- 148 What Does NAPARC Do? (2)**
- 151 Retirement of Dr. G. Nederveen**
- 153 Welcome Rev. T. Wierenga and Family**
- 155 The Women's Savings Action News**
- 156 PRESS RELEASE**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
E-Mail: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2014 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$ 92.00
International			\$98.00	\$154.00

***Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.**
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2013 ADVERTISING RATES

Advertisements: \$19.50 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch. We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the  Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

to construct a church from a bunch of dead, doomed, and dominated sinners? Why go to all of this great effort? The answer is in verse 7 – “In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2).

Did you catch that? God creates the church in order to show off the riches of his grace. The church is the living proof of his grace. Elsewhere another apostle writes about the church too and says “you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9).

So what is the church? It is to be a community of show-offs! It is to be a billboard people! It is to “declare” God’s praises! The church of Jesus Christ is to show the world what grace is all about and what constitutes real praise. The apostle Paul adds that we are also to be a shining people. Living as we do in the midst of “a crooked and depraved generation,” we are to “shine like stars in the universe” (Phil 2:15). There has to be this very public, in your face, reflective side to the church. The church has to stand out in this world.

Where’s the offense?

Do we realize this? Are we aware of this? I suspect that while we know this to be true we do not consciously or purposely stress this. In this connection the language of Lord’s Day 48 about the kingdom of God comes to mind. There we are asked, “What is the second petition?” and part of the answer is “preserve and increase” the church. Notice that there are these two sides of preservation and augmentation. Or, to put it in popular language, the church needs to be like a good hockey team. It needs lots of defense (preserve) and lots of offense (increase).

Does your church team have that? Often the defense may be in good shape, as we know how to defend our teachings and doctrines. We can smell a heretic a mile away. But that still leaves the offense. What about it? How good are we at pushing and promoting the gospel in this world as a church? Some may point to the mission field and all of the prayers and monies it receives, but what about at home? Is it perhaps a case of the foreign offense being in fine shape but the local offense limping along on one leg?

Developing offense

How do you get the local offense going? Or, how do you turn a congregation of spiritual introverts into a bunch of spiritual extroverts?

There is no easy or single answer. For one it takes vision. The leadership of the church, namely the pas-

tor, elders, and deacons, need to embrace the fact that a healthy church is a balanced church consisting of both a good offense and defense. Having only one or the other will always result in defeat.

For another it needs a lot of prayer. It is the power of God that creates the church and it is the same power that has to re-create the church. Human effort does not go very far. As a matter of fact, it goes nowhere. On the other hand, divine help and effort knows no limits. Coat all of your efforts in prayer.

Creating offense also requires persistent teaching. A coach who has been saddled with a team that knows only defense has to go out of his way to teach, teach, teach. (And sometimes, when that that does not work, he has to trade.) Such is the duty of the pastor. One of my old teachers, the Rev. Gilbert VanDooren, loved to compare a pastor to a coach.

Colleagues, to some extent the onus is on you. What are you doing in your catechism classes? What are you doing in your adult education classes? Hopefully, you are not making the pew even more comfortable than it already is. Hopefully, you are teaching your people to embrace also their prophetic and missional calling in this world.

This goes, however, not just for the pastor, but also for the Christian school teacher. God’s covenant children need to be instructed as well in their calling to “show off” and “declare” the gospel. They need to be reminded that there is more to the Christian life than becoming a religious consumer.

And then there is preaching

So there is teaching, but there is also preaching. As the pastor coaches the covenant children in the catechism classes, so he also coaches all of God’s covenant people from the pulpit. The preaching of the gospel is the most powerful means by which to remind, instruct, encourage, admonish, and feed God’s people spiritually.

But to what end? Personally, I can think of no better end than what we read in Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica. There the apostle says about the believers in that place, “Your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thes 1:8). Imagine that? Imagine being known as “walkie talkies” for the Lord. What a most marvellous tribute! It comes out of the apostle’s mouth almost as an aside comment but it strikes at the very heart of what it means to be church.

Readers, just how good is your church team? Is it all defense? Is the offense nowhere in sight? Then bring on the offense. Strive for biblical balance!





Ryan Kampen
 Minister of the Emmanuel
 American Reformed Church at
 Denver, Colorado
 rjkampen@gmail.com

Incomparable Love and Incomparable Death

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

(Romans 5:7-8)

To what can you compare the death of Jesus Christ? Paul's words leave us completely tongue-tied to answer; we are speechless! Christ's death is beyond compare because it is based on God's love beyond compare. Already in human terms and experience, Christ's death was unlike any other death. Verse 7 says, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." What does Paul mean by this? Can we know who this righteous person is? Or who is this good man? And how do they figure into Paul's discussion about the great love of God?

It's rare for someone to give up his life for anyone else. It is very difficult to sacrifice our life for another, for our child, or our Mom or Dad. We love our own life so much. We are deeply attached to this world. The apostle constructs a hypothetical situation, a scenario for the sake of discussion. There is a righteous man. And let's not think that Paul has in mind someone who is righteous before God, justified by faith. He is thinking of a man belonging to the community. This man is righteous, blameless in the eyes of the law. He is honest in his business practices. He is respectful toward others. He is a model citizen. It would be rare, Paul says, for someone to die for him. It might happen, but only because of the character of the

righteous man. At least he might be worth dying for. But only a few would offer to die for such a person.

Paul goes on to say that perhaps for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. This good man is different from the righteous man. Righteous men are a dime a dozen; you find them all over. They are both unbelievers and believers. They do what they are obligated to do. But there is something different about the good man. He goes over and above what the laws of the land require. He gives more than just respect to his fellow man, he does what he can to promote the character and honour of his fellow man!

So the righteous man is obedient to the law; he lives above reproach. But the good man does noteworthy, honour-worthy, praise-worthy things! Such a man's goodness would be worth dying for. Someone might be willing, because of their love for this man, to give their life for him. But even that takes great courage.

Paul's point? You'll be hard-pressed to find this kind of self-sacrificing love among people. It is extremely difficult and very rare for anyone to reach within himself and produce this kind of love for someone else. No one easily gives up his life.

For us, we may not consider ourselves as either good or righteous. We were so far off the mark; we had forsaken fellowship with our God. From

our at-one-time-good status before God, we plummeted headlong into the status of "bad," "evil" people. For someone to die for us—not worth it at all! Yet this is where the love of Christ becomes manifest: While we were still sinners, wicked, evil people, Christ gave himself up for us. He died to set us free. What amazing love! Christ came into this world to bring not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came not to seek the good, he came for the lost. Christ died for the powerless and ungodly. Our only hope for salvation is in the love of God, shown in the incomparable death of Jesus Christ.

This love is beyond compare. The love of God is nothing like the best kind of love that man might know or be able to produce. None of us can say, "I know someone in my life who loves like this." It is divine, unique, in its own category. It is from our sovereign, gracious God.

Paul wants us to try and compare the love of God so that we might see just how incomparable it really is. Also so that we might grow in our trust and hope in God above, from whom this love flows so remarkably, so overwhelmingly. You won't find it in a righteous man; you won't find it in a good man. It comes from God alone, portrayed in such a unique fashion on the cross, for our salvation. What a death! What a love! What a God and Saviour!





Kevin DeYounge
Senior Pastor at University
Reformed Church(RCA) in
East Lansing, Michigan
pastor@urc-msu.org

The Scandal of the Semi-Churched

This article was originally for www.thegospelcoalition.org and is reprinted with permission.

This is one of those posts I've wanted to write for awhile, but I wasn't sure how to say what I think needs to be said. The danger of legalism and false guilt is very real. But so is the danger of disobedience and self-deception.

I want to talk about church members who attend their home church with great irregularity. These aren't unchurched folks, or de-churched, or under-churched. They are semi-churched. They show up some of the time, but not every week. They are on again/off again, in and out, here on Sunday and gone for two. That's the scandal of the semi-churched. In fact, Thom Rainer argues that the number one reason for the decline in church attendance is that church members don't go to church as often as they used to.¹

We've had Christmas and Easter Christians for probably as long as we've had Christmas and Easter. Some people will always be intermittent with their church attendance. I'm not talking about nominal Christians who wander into church once or twice a year. I'm talking about people who went through the trouble of joining a church, like their church, have no particular beef with the church, and still only darken its doors once or twice a month. If there are churches with membership rolls much larger than their average Sunday attendance, they have either under-shepherds derelict in their duties, members faithless in theirs, or both.

I know we are the church and don't go to church (blah, blah, blah), but being persnickety about our language doesn't change the exhortation of Hebrews 10:25.

We should not neglect to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing. Gathering every Lord's Day with our church family is one of the pillars of mature Christianity.

So ask yourself a few questions.

1. Have you established church going as an inviolable habit in your family?

You know how you wake up in the morning and think "maybe I'll go on a run today" or "maybe I'll make french toast this morning"? That's not what church attendance should be like. It shouldn't be an "if the mood feels right" proposition. I will always be thankful that my parents treated church attendance (morning and evening) as an immovable pattern. It wasn't up for discussion. It wasn't based on extenuating circumstances. It was never a maybe. We went to church. That's what we did. That made the decision every Sunday a simple one, because there was no real decision. Except for desperate illness, we were going to show up. Giving your family the same kind of habit is a gift they won't appreciate now, but will usually thank you for later.

2. Do you plan ahead on Saturday so you can make church a priority on Sunday?

We are all busy people, so it can be hard to get to church, especially with a house full of kids. We will never make the most of our Sundays unless we prepare for them on Saturday. That likely means finishing homework, getting to bed on time, and foregoing some football. If church is an afterthought, you won't think of it until after it's too late.

3. Do you order your travel plans so as to minimize being gone from your church on Sunday?

I don't want to be legalistic with this question. I've travelled on Sunday before (though I try to avoid it). I take vacation and study leave and miss eight or nine Sundays at URC per year. I understand we live in a mobile culture. I understand people want to visit their kids and grandkids on the weekend (and boy am I thankful when ours come and visit). Gone are the days when people would be in town fifty to fifty-two weeks a year. Travel is too easy. Our families are too dispersed. But listen, this doesn't mean we can't make a real effort to be around on Sunday. You might want to take Friday off to go visit the kids so you can be back on Saturday night. You might want to think twice about investing in a second home that will draw you away from your church a dozen weekends every year. You might want to re-evaluate your assumption that Friday evening through Sunday evening is yours to do whatever you want wherever you want. It's almost impossible to grow in love for your church and minister effectively in your church if you are regularly not there.

4. Are you willing to make sacrifices to gather with God's people for worship every Sunday?

"But you don't expect me to cancel my plans for Saturday night, do you? I can't possibly rearrange my work

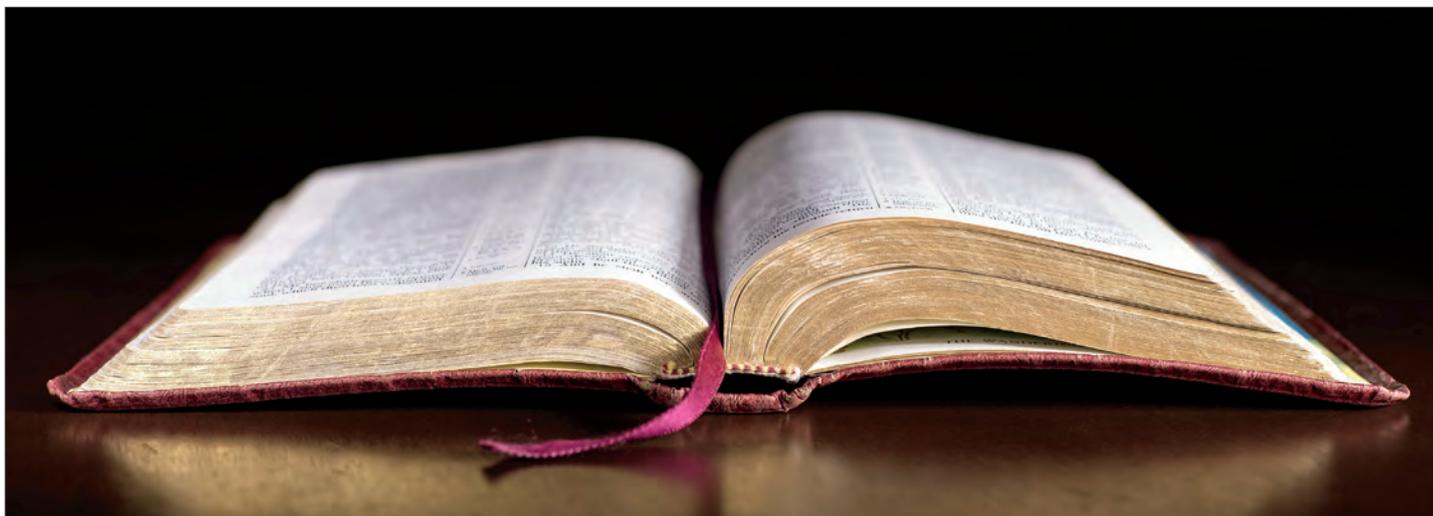
schedule. This job requires me to work every Sunday – I'd have to get a new job if I wanted to be regular at church. Sundays are my day to rewind. I won't get all the yard work done if I go to church every week. My kids won't be able to play soccer if we don't go to Sunday games. If my homework is going to be done by Sunday, I won't be able to chill out Friday night and all day Saturday. Surely God wouldn't want me to sacrifice too much just so I can show up at church!" Not exactly the way of the cross, is it?

5. Have you considered that you may not be a Christian?

Who knows how many people God saves "as through fire" (1 Cor 3:15). Does going to church every week make you a Christian? Absolutely not. Does missing church thirty-five Sundays a year make you a non-Christian? It does beg the question. God's people love to be with God's people. They love to sing praises. They love to feast at the Table. They love to be fed from the Scriptures. Infrequent church attendance – I mean not going anywhere at all – is a sign of immaturity at best and unbelief at worst. For whenever God calls people out of darkness he calls them into the church. If the Sunday worship service is the community of the redeemed, what does your weekly pattern suggest to God about where you truly belong?

¹ <http://thomrainer.com/2013/08/19/the-number-one-reason-for-the-decline-in-church-attendance-and-five-ways-to-address-it/>

C





Peter H. Holtvlüwer
 Minister of the Spring Creek
 Canadian Reformed Church
 at Tintern, Ontario
 holtvlüwer@bell.net

What does NAPARC Do?

(Part 2)

In the previous article (Vol 63, No 4), we saw that NAPARC is basically a formalized discussion group for committed, confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches. So, what does such a group actually do? Well, naturally it *discusses* things – things of mutual concern and benefit to member churches. The discussion is intended to set the groundwork for possible cooperative *action* among the member churches.

To be sure, any such action is not NAPARC's decision but is decided upon by each individual church. As was explained previously, NAPARC is solely an advisory body which may make suggestions but exercises no authority over member churches. Discussion groups foster ideas but it's up to each member to decide what to do with those ideas.

NAPARC's Constitution sets out the general parameters of the discussion in its second article when it describes NAPARC as "a fellowship that enables the constituent churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice" (www.naparc.org; all subsequent quotations of the Constitution are taken from this location).

Three sorts of meetings

There are three basic ways that NAPARC fosters discussion: 1) *the annual meeting* of all member churches together; 2) *church-to-church meetings* where two or three delegations may meet privately (in the hours around the annual meeting); 3) *consultation meetings* where delegates from all churches are invited to share information and discuss all aspects of common tasks or callings such as mission work, diaconal, or world-relief work.

The single most obvious way that NAPARC gets discussion going is by holding the general annual meeting, normally in November. This brings delegates from all member churches together in one place and, during this time, those other meetings can take place as well. Up until 2013, the annual meeting was held over a two-day period but beginning in 2014 it will be expanded to three days, the Lord willing. This is to allow for a longer NAPARC meeting (with a few more agenda items) but also for more discussion between member churches outside of it.

Annual meeting

So, what does NAPARC's annual meeting look like? All member churches are invited to send up to four delegates. Often, non-member Reformed churches are invited to send observer delegates as a way to introduce them to the discussion and see whether NAPARC would be a good fit for them. Imagine, then, a large room filled with forty-plus delegates usually seated at tables, while fifteen to twenty observer delegates are off to the side or back in rows of chairs. Formats will change depending on the venue as each church takes its turn to host.

At the front of the room sits the chairman together with the secretary. They, together with the vice-chairman and treasurer (who normally sit with their home church delegations), make up the executive of NAPARC. Each position is held for a one-year period with the possibility that the secretary and treasurer may be reappointed. In practice, these two positions have been held by the same trustworthy brothers for many years in a row. The positions of chairman and vice-chairman rotate annually in sequence from church to church. 2013 was the year the Canadian Reformed Churches provided the chairman.

This November 11-13, 2014 the Canadian Reformed Churches will (DV) host NAPARC in the Grassie church building (southern Ontario). Members of local churches may attend to observe the proceedings, something I would encourage, so please consider dropping in during those times (see www.naparc.org for more details as the date approaches). It would be good for our people to better understand what NAPARC is and does. A devotional or prayer service is being planned for the evening of November 11 as well to which church members in the area are invited to attend.

The docket

The main item on NAPARC's docket (what we would normally call its "agenda") is the reports received from each member church. Each church body submits in advance a written report of life among its own congregations over the past year. A delegate from that church will give an oral summary to the meeting. This report may highlight statistical growth or loss, key decisions of any broader assemblies, position papers that have been adopted, mission works, and particular blessings or struggles which the church may be experiencing. Intercessory prayer is often asked for.

By way of these reports, member churches become familiar with each other and can gain an appreciation for one another. There is opportunity to ask questions for further information and then another church delegation will lead the meeting in prayer for the reporting church. In that prayer, its specific joys and concerns are brought before the Lord. It's often very encouraging to hear the firm and faithful positions that member churches take when faced with controversial or outright false teachings or pressures to conform to the world. You can hear the God-given resolve in each church delegation to stay true to God's Word and remain consciously Reformed in a world of unbelief and liberal Christianity.

Committee of Review

In 2009, NAPARC appointed a Committee of Review to study its own Constitution and Bylaws to see whether NAPARC was living up to its own stated goals. I think it's safe to say that the review was triggered by the thought

that NAPARC could do this better. I don't think I'm alone in saying that while the annual meeting has value in helping to familiarize churches with each other, it has not (in these last years at least) been helpful in addressing those things which keep member churches apart. In this respect, NAPARC has not offered much stimulation for churches to work toward union.

One of NAPARC's goals is to hold before member churches the "desirability and need for organic union of churches desire that are of like faith and practice" (NAPARC Constitution, Art 2). Until 2013, that very point has not been on the annual agenda. What happens at the meeting, then, is much *sharing* (which is good) but very little *analyzing* of the things which separate and consequently very little brain-storming on how member churches themselves might work to overcome these and pursue unity.

That, however, is set to change in 2014. The Committee filed its completed report in 2013 and NAPARC voted to make changes to both the Constitution and the Bylaws. These changes do not alter the substance of what NAPARC has always stood for but it is hoped that these changes will allow NAPARC to better attain its goals. The docket will now include reports on any consultations or conferences (which may have been held under the auspices of NAPARC) in order to share what was learned with all member churches. In particular, the agenda will include this item: "Discussion Regarding Progress Towards Organic Union," which should help give focus and momentum to our calling to unify as believers.¹

Church-to-church meetings

One of the very practical benefits of the annual NAPARC meeting is the opportunity for member churches to meet one-on-one with each other, or perhaps three or four churches together, as desired. This church-to-church meeting is the second kind of discussion that NAPARC provides for. Our own synodical committee (CCCNA) takes full advantage of this to arrange meetings with our sister churches (ERQ, OPC, RCUS) and churches we have contact with (RPCNA and, in the past, the FRCNA). Our Church Unity Coordinators have also attended NAPARC in recent years (as observers) in order to meet with their

counterparts in the URCNA. These meetings allow us to strengthen our bonds of fellowship as well as address any issues of concern with one another.

There is also much informal contact between individual delegates at breaks and meal times. Here we “bump into” people from denominations we are not familiar with and begin to get to know each other. Our committee members try to make it a point to sit with people from different churches, to mix and mingle widely so as to develop ties. This kind of work is pleasant and useful for the smooth running of NAPARC itself. It also helps to introduce our federation to others and vice versa. Such informal contact may help in future should the churches, through general synod, ever mandate the CCCNA to pursue formal contact with one or more of them.

Consultation meetings

The third form of discussion that NAPARC fosters is what are called “consultations” on issues shared by member churches. Member churches are free (but not required) to send delegates to take part in sharing information about the particular challenges and strategies member churches each face in a certain area of church life. For example, a regular consultation on home mission and world mission work has taken place in recent years just prior to the annual meeting. Our federation has taken part in the latter and the word back is that such discussions are very useful.

Since all churches do mission work, we can learn from one another in how to go about it, how to handle special difficulties, what approaches work and what do not. The new agenda for the annual NAPARC meeting will include the reporting of all such consultations. This should help make those discussions even more profitable, particularly for churches which were not able to send delegates to the consultation.

This area of NAPARC cooperation could be even more effectively used for other issues of common concern. Consultations among relief agencies (like our CRWRF), which most member churches have, would be helpful in building a network of contacts for disaster relief and to generally learn from each other worthwhile tactics as well as pitfalls to avoid. We don’t need to re-

invent the wheel. The same could be said for Christian education, Catechism instruction, diaconal work, or even theological training. Comparing notes with fellow Reformed believers on matters we all work on can be very advantageous while at the same time drawing us closer together in Christian fellowship. Since NAPARC doesn’t organize this but rather “encourages” consultations, it is up to member churches to initiate them. This is an aspect of NAPARC that our churches (or better: the agencies within our churches) should take more advantage of.²

Conferences

NAPARC’s Constitution allows for the possibility of calling together conferences (with voluntary attendance) or even appointing study committees. NAPARC minutes show that, in the more distant past, both of these things have been done but since our federation’s time at NAPARC we haven’t witnessed this. The study papers received by NAPARC over the decades have recently been dug out of the archives and are being prepared for publication on NAPARC’s website. Sharing in conferences on subjects of mutual interest could be, like the more private consultations, of significant mutual benefit. It is yet another way to grow closer while sharpening one another as “iron sharpens iron” (Prov 27:17).

Now that we have a sense of what NAPARC is and what it does, next time I hope to begin introducing the member churches, starting with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP).

¹ This new agenda item should better serve the goal set out in Article 3.1 of the Constitution to, “Facilitate discussion and consultation between member bodies on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common and by the sharing of insights ‘communicate advantages to one another’ (*Institutes* IV, 2, 1).”

² Consult NAPARC’s website for contact information on various denomination agencies. If one is not listed, contact Rev. Holtvlüwer to help make a connection.



Retirement of Dr. G. Nederveen

After twenty-three years of preaching, teaching, shepherding, and giving guidance and direction, Rev. G. Nederveen led the afternoon worship service on August 25, 2013 for a final time as minister of the Ebenezer Congregation in Burlington.

His ministry

Rev. G. Nederveen started his ministry on February 19, 1984, in the Canadian Reformed church at Brampton. He served that congregation for thirteen years before accepting the call extended to him by the Burlington Ebenezer congregation. He was installed on August 12, 1991 in Burlington Ebenezer and we have been blessed with his pastoral preaching and shepherding from that time to his retirement on August 31, 2013.

Rev. G. Nederveen faithfully preached the Word, performed a myriad of other pastoral activities in our congregation, and served neighboring Canadian Reformed churches, as well as the Canadian Reformed federation, in numerous capacities.

It was time to say “good-bye” but only in an official capacity as he and his wife have decided to remain living in the area and remain members of Ebenezer.



Celebration and appreciation

Following Rev. Nederveen’s farewell sermon on August 25, 2013, various colleagues and representatives from other churches were given an opportunity to address Rev. Nederveen, expressing their appreciation and thankfulness for the work performed by our minister and wishing him a long and blessed retirement.

After this, the congregation moved to the John Calvin School building to celebrate the retirement of our minister with a potluck dinner and entertainment. All the children and grandchildren of Rev. and Mrs. Nederveen, as well many members of their extended family, were present as well. The evening was filled with anecdotes, entertainment, choral pieces, expressions of gratitude and appreciation, as well as wishes for a well-deserved retirement. Mrs. Nederveen was also thanked for the work she did in the congregation and for the support and assistance provided to her husband during his ministry. There was ample opportunity to socialize and to offer personal congratulations. A highlight of the evening was when one of our members played a musical tribute specifically composed for the occasion.





At the end of the evening, Rev. and Mrs. Nederveen were asked to come forward by our Master of Ceremonies, Art Hordyk, to receive a farewell gift from the congregation. Knowing that the Nederveens love to travel, the congregation gave them a monetary contribution towards their long planned trip to South Africa to visit family and to see the country.

After our emeritus minister expressed his appreciation and gratitude for all his years in the ministry and in our congregation, the celebration was closed with thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for having granted us an able servant all these years and asking for his continued guidance for Rev. and Mrs. Nederveen as well as for our now vacant congregation and that God may grant a new pastor in due time. C



Welcome Rev. T. Wierenga and Family

Ordination

January 5, 2014. Outside, the majestic workings of our God clearly evident in the wintery scene, an impending snowfall slowly taking effect. Each snowflake unique, gently falling exactly in place, at the will of the Lord our God.

Inside, Candidate T. Wierenga and his family, sitting at the front of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus, ON. Exactly in place, at the majestic workings and will of God.

Our congregation had said good-bye to our former minister Rev. Agema, who had been called to serve in Guelph. Now, just shy of two years later, God has provided us with our eighth minister of the Word.

Dr. J. VanVliet led the installation service with the text of 2 Timothy 4:1, 2 bearing the theme, "I give you this charge." In the words of God and Christ Jesus, Paul gives the charge to preach the Word, for this is what is necessary to equip man for all situations in life. Therein lies the resources for life. He encouraged Rev. Wierenga to have patience and to pray for the ability to instruct. Believe in God and he will not disappoint. And this charge radiates not only to the preacher, but to the congregation as a whole. For in giving this charge, God lifts the eyes of all, to the preservation of God's eternal promises.

Afterwards, Rev. Wierenga responded "I do" to the tasks and responsibilities of his task as pastor and teacher. Several letters and representatives offered congratulatory remarks as well as words of encouragement.

It took a moving truck, manual labour, and planning to get the Wierengas here; however, as Rev. VanVliet stated in his sermon, it is not the "behind the scenes," rather the "above the scenes" that we should recognize and rejoice in.



The Rev. Wierenga and Lidy enjoying some Fergus humour

Inaugural sermon

That afternoon, Rev. Wierenga preached his inaugural sermon. The text focused on was Matthew 20:28. The theme chosen was "Christ Jesus, the greatest Servant, has ransomed us for service in his kingdom."

Christ sacrificed his life that others could live. Not with silver or gold, but with his precious blood. He was smitten by God, yet in his stripes, lie healing for those who believe. God himself offered this ransom price. His servant, punished for us. Remembering that we needed this ransom paid is an important part of our belief, our faith. Putting trust in the ransom of Christ is the hope in which we live. Without the Spirit, there will be no belief, trust, hope, and acceptance of the truth of the gospel.

This led into the second point, speaking of our service. The Son of man came to earth and humbled himself to serve God's people. Rev. Wierenga encouraged the congregation to fully carry out their service. The Lord places people where he wants them to be and being servants of



*Martin Jongsma conducts the orchestra,
who also lead the singing*

God, that is to be our focus each day. We must pray for the strength of Christ who paid our ransom, so we too can be humble and submissive, carrying out our tasks in his service and serve those around us. With this comes the beauty of him dwelling in us, and us sharing in his glory. It doesn't get any greater than that.

Welcome evening

The welcome evening took place January 10, 2014. Chairman, Br. Theo Flach, opened the evening with reading Isaiah 40 and with a word of prayer.

The family, Rev. Wierenga, his wife Lidy, and their children Ryan, Jeanette, Corina, Jared, and Shawna sat front and centre of the packed gym of the Maranatha Christian School. Many different groups graced the stage. The children of the congregation sang for the family. From the mouth of children we heard the words, "Praise be to him, the Lord Most High." The Maranatha Musicians impressed us all with their powerful playing.

The societies all stepped up to the plate with excellent presentations. The Men's Society presented, using props and pictures, the last names that compile our congregation. Following that, the women's society gave the family a number of survival tips and items necessary for living in Fergus such as passes for the pool, library cards, magazines, and earplugs for the Fergus Truck pull! They gave the family this with very impressive Scottish accents! Rev. Wierenga and his son Ryan were called up on stage to participate in some traditional Scottish festival activities including the hammer throw, caber toss, and sheave toss. The young peoples had the whole congregation singing a song they made which ended with a shower of gifts for the family.

Finally, on behalf of the congregation and the consistory, Charles Westrik presented the family with a gift and words of encouragement.

Rev. Wierenga spoke at the end of the evening. The previous Sunday reminded him of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. The words of fear and trembling brought on a whole new meaning last Sunday. He beautifully stated that we begin a new road together. A beautiful task, preaching the Word, administering sacraments, bringing the Word into the home. Rev. Wierenga reminded us that this road and these tasks are not done via our own strength, but with God's power, in the Lord, together.

He spoke words of thankfulness for this evening, the previous Sunday, and the warm welcome extended to his family. The congregation sang and Rev. Wierenga led in a closing prayer.

"You showed your favour to your land, O Lord." C



*Rev. Wierenga and Ryan Wierenga
participate in a
Highland Games re-enactment*

News from the Women's Savings Action

This year the farmer's combine came late in the year. Snow had already fallen. The corn was standing in at least a foot of snow. We were eating supper when we heard the unmistakable sound of the combine. Though it was already dark, we could still see the chaff blowing out the back of the big red machine and the header up front as the bright headlights shone on the corn below. It's a good thing supper was almost finished because family fellowship soon erupted in all the excitement.

The next day the children filled a little sled with cobs that the combine had missed. We watched a flock of wild turkeys glean across the field as well. In Ruth's day, Boaz had to instruct his workers to drop a little extra for her. And today even a combine leaves produce behind for the gleaners.

What does this all have to do with the Women's Savings Action (WSA)? Could the WSA be compared to Ruth as she gleaned in the barley fields? In the past, leftover change after a shopping trip was dropped into the WSA tin, in order to be passed along to the WSA rep during the special collection month. Now not many of us have a WSA tin since change isn't around as much, but brothers and sisters still make sure that there is some of their financial harvest to give to the modern-day sisters of Ruth: the WSA.

Yet is the library at the Theological Seminary poor and in need of gleaning? If the wonderful system of the WSA and the donations given by all of our brothers and sisters were not there, it just might be.

Once again, our librarian has expressed her sincere appreciation. She told us that the price of electronic subscriptions, printed books, and periodicals keeps rising.

With thankfulness, with your support, the library was able to purchase 275 books and two DVDs. The library was also able to spend \$17,093 on periodicals and databases. One of the main databases, the American Theological Library Association database (ATLA), contains over 600,000 full-text articles from scholarly theological journals. That's quite an extensive resource!

Here's some more interesting library news for you: the librarian, Mrs. Margaret Alkema, continues to add to the Reformed Periodical Index. The magazines being indexed are *Clarion*, *Diakonia*, *Lux Mundi*, *Preach the Word*, *Reformed Perspective*, and *Ethics in Brief*. If you are in need of information, try typing the address to the Seminary's website: www.crts.ca, and then go to the Library menu and look for the "Search Reformed Periodical Index" option. The library also has had new bookshelves installed in the lower library to accommodate the new books which your donations are purchasing.

Thank you to everyone for dropping some of your financial extras for us to glean. Thank you also to the reps in each congregation for all the gleaning that you accomplish each year. Without your faithful collections our library would indeed be lacking. Thank you above all to our God for allowing us all to continue our work in order to serve him.

Joanne Van Dam (chairman)

Chris Nienhuis (treasurer)

Janet Van Vliet (secretary)



Women's Savings Action

Contributions for the year July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013

(With comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	2013	2012	Congregation	2013	2012
Abbotsford	1740.00	2290.00	Houston	--	--
Aldergrove	1040.00	1385.00	Kerwood	210.00	249.00
Ancaster	668.10	843.38	Langley	2030.00	1640.00
Attercliffe	1510.98	2212.00	Langley/Willoughby Heights	1080.00	1200.00
Barrhead	710.00	--	Lincoln	490.00	365.00
Brampton	150.00	150.00	London	--	--
Burlington/Ebenezer	--	1057.25	Lynden	656.82	466.44
Burlington/Fellowship	270.00	255.00	Neerlandia	--	420.00
Burlington/Waterdown	410.19	--	Orangeville	171.00	200.00
Calgary	1046.39	--	Ottawa	280.00	175.00
Carman/East	453.00	440.00	Owen Sound	--	545.00
Carman/West	440.00	407.00	Smithers	370.00	430.00
Chatham	420.10	411.95	Smithville	2467.00	2184.00
Chilliwack	450.00	780.00	Spring Creek	356.00	283.55
Cloverdale	280.00	345.00	St. Albert	1430.00	1635.00
Coaldale	755.00	522.50	Surrey	335.00	170.00
Dunnville/Wainfleet	235.15	1056.75	Taber	--	--
Edmonton/Immanuel	3527.00	3185.00	Toronto	125.00	100.00
Edmonton/Providence	1675.00	1385.00	Vernon	510.00	595.00
Elora	723.50	297.00	Winnipeg/Grace	635.00	620.00
Fergus/North	131.83	70.46	Winnipeg/Redeemer	667.00	950.00
Fergus/South (Maranatha)	598.50	480.50	Yarrow	1591.75	185.00
Flamborough	880.25	505.00			
Glanbrook	910.52	1033.49	Launceston, Tasmania	--	3958.00
Grand Rapids	280.19	331.05	Royalties Selles	--	873.52
Grand Valley	281.05	325.11			
Grassie	668.20	379.28			
Guelph	535.37	574.61			
Hamilton/Cornerstone	1363.77	1539.47			
Hamilton/Providence	240.00	750.51	Total Collected	35798.66	40256.82

**Canadian Reformed
World Relief Fund
Press Release
January 16, 2014**



The Board of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund would like to express our thanks for the financial and prayerful support of our individual donors in the year of our Lord, 2013. Our prayer is for guidance and wisdom as we seek to disburse the resources entrusted to us with integrity, responsibility, and for the benefit of our neighbour and the glory of God's name.

We also thank the churches who have supported us and trusted our stewardship over the fund. We thank the brothers, elders and deacons, as well as delegates who have contributed by responding to our survey as well as provided oversight by attending our Annual General Meeting in November. These comments served to inform the renewal of our General Policy 2014-2019 which was ratified at our AGM. You will find this policy posted on

our website, www.crwrf.ca, under the heading "About."

In 2014, the Board will continue to address some of the comments received regarding incorporation of the fund (according to Canadian tax laws) as well as how this relates to the structure of the Board. Opportunities are being pursued through NAPARC and MERF to see if there are possibilities to be introduced to new international partners attached to these associations.

Most of all, we solicit your prayers for the recipients of the fund, those who are hungry, sick, oppressed, or neglected. Disaster, famine, war, and the ravages of HIV/AIDS continue to show the signs of the times to an unrepentant and broken world. As believers, our lives ought to be living sacrifices as we wait with eager expectation for the renewal of all creation through the return of our Redeemer. Through the work of the Spirit, his love and mercy will be seen and experienced through the hands and feet of his followers, that all might see him and live and die in hope, rejoicing in his righteousness.

Sheila Kamstra,
Corresponding Secretary 





William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q What message are we sending the readers of *Clarion* when it publishes articles in which CanRC members speak approvingly of doing things together with Christians or churches who are not members of the CanRC or a recognised sister church? For example, Rev. J. Van Popta in his article “NAPARC Missions Consultation” refers to a meeting of representatives from denominational mission boards in order “to share what their churches are doing.” The same can be said for the article of Prof. Van Dam. He speaks with appreciation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), a “national association of evangelical Christians” which “provides a country-wide voice for articulating biblical principles” in politics. If we can serve the Lord together with Christians of non-sister churches, why should our young folks not conclude that they can serve the Lord together in marriage with members of those churches? What sort of message are such articles sending (especially younger) readers?

A biblically-based answer would be much appreciated.

*J. Numan,
Mt. Nasura, Australia*

A In a biblically-based answer we can look at two words of the Lord Jesus, which he spoke in two different situations: Matthew 12:30 and Mark 9:40. In Mark 9, the Jew who was outside the circle around the Lord Jesus was *not opposing him* (like almost everyone else was at that time). Rather, he used the name of the Lord Jesus sympathetically, positively, for he had discovered that in that name was heavenly power, divine power. This man, at least practically, supported the work of the Lord Jesus; he put the people for the choice, be it indirectly. Then he is not against us, the Lord Jesus concludes; he is not standing on Satan’s side. The Lord Jesus articulates this when he says, “No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me.”

With Mark 9 the Lord Jesus guards us against *extremism*. Some people denounce everything that does not belong to the true church of Christ. Whatever is not Reformed, in their opinion, is worthless. A conversion which has taken place outside the true church can’t be much of a conversion. That cannot be true though! That would typically be the behaviour of a Boarneges, a “son of thunder,” as the Lord Jesus called John and James for such an attitude. With John Calvin’s commentary on this, we should even come so far as to say that we are happy and thankful for such a conversion. With the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, we may say as well, “Whether ‘under a cover’ or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

Thankfully, there still are organizations and movements, such as the one mentioned by Dr. Van Dam, which

do a lot of good work, works of mercy, works of reformation, and works of being a salt in our society politically, socially, ethically. We should be thankful for this and we should not despise it. Whatever happens outside the true church in the battle against Satan and against the apostasy from God should make us rejoice! Such thankfulness is not the end and final stance though. At the same time we should continue to pursue every avenue and opportunity to bring unity among those who may be with us *for Christ* but who do not yet *gather with us in Christ*. With Matthew 12:30 we again observe that the Lord Jesus advocates a personal attachment of love, the bond of communion with him: i.e. being *with him*. That should be the overriding attitude of our life: in everything to be with Christ. In such a life of faith and love in Christ, it is important as well that we therefore seek to *gather with Christ*, seek the communion of saints which is the faithful gathering of Christ, the true church.

Matthew 12, therefore, encourages us as well to pursue the unity of the church in the unity of the true faith, gathering *with Christ*. As churches we do so by pursuing ecclesiastical fellowship with churches that we have recognized as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. We use forums such as the ICRC and NAPARC to do so, in the context of which we observe and benefit of the work that the Lord Jesus has been doing by his Spirit and Word to preserve and defend others in the true faith. He may have

gone a different route with them than he has with the continentally Reformed churches, but nevertheless gathering and increasing his church and building his kingdom in their midst. This is the positive implication in the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12, which we should see in contrast with the works of those who scatter the flock by their opposition to Christ (as the Pharisees did!), by opposing the truth of Christ, deviating from the Word of Christ. If the Lord Jesus, therefore, guards us in Mark 9 against *extremism*, Matthew 12 also warns us for *relativism* regarding the church gathering work of Christ!

What then is the message sent to the readers, especially the younger ones and those who are seeking a marriage partner? We may be thankful for all the activities the Lord works and allows yet among the wider community of Christian believers. We can learn a lot from those who have been at the frontlines in the battle against Satan's work of scattering the sheep and opposing the Christ. Hence, we should arm our younger generation for this spiritual warfare! And with a view to their marriage pursuits, we should encourage them to seek a marriage *in the Lord*, which is a marriage in the unity of the true faith. This unity of the true faith is the main characteristic in our confession of Christ's church gathering work. Hence our young people must seek Christ in his church which is faithful to his Word and find their partner in their midst as well!



You Asked

A New Clarion Feature

Is there something you've been wanting to know? An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions via email to Rev. W. denHollander at denhollanderw@gmail.com